Urgent Opportunities in Wisconsin’s Early Childhood Investments

Key findings from statewide conversations and surveys by the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Prenatal to Five Initiative

Wisconsin is home to nearly 400,000 children under age five, and communities across the state have voiced consistent support for increased public investments in early childhood care and education priorities. COVID-19 and broader discussion of racial inequities in 2020 only intensified the urgency of these needs.

Based on “regional summit” community conversations and stakeholder surveys from across the state, as well as ongoing relationships with a broad range of partners, researchers with the Prenatal to Five Initiative (P25) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison found:

Wisconsin families need more child care options:
- Prior to COVID-19, Wisconsin had just 57 child care slots for infants, toddlers, or preschoolers for every 100 children whose parents work outside the home.
- That figure worsened with COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, there were 166,052 slots. As of July 2020, there were 137,137 slots, a 17.4% decrease.

Wisconsin families need state-supported affordable and equitable child care options:
- In Wisconsin, married-couple families pay, on average, 13% of their income for child care.
- Single-parent families pay, on average, 34% of their income for child care.

1 “Child population by age group in Wisconsin” (2019 figures), Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center.
2 Prenatal to Five Regional Summit, 2019.

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Wisconsin child care providers need fair, livable pay and high-quality training:

- The average annual income of a Wisconsin child care worker is $22,630, hovering just around the federal poverty level for a family of three.
- Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, there were 3,906 licensed providers. As of July 2020, there were 3,212 licensed providers, a 17.8% decrease.

Wisconsin child care providers need support:

Fully 100 percent of survey respondents said COVID-19 negatively affected their work, and 78 percent said racism negatively impacted their family or community:

- “Every other sector relies on child care availability for parents to return to work.”
  - Paula Drew, Wisconsin Early Childhood Association

- “They say we’re essential... but without the financial assistance to safely operate, we feel utterly expendable.”
  - Wisconsin child care provider

- “We can’t get tired. We have to take rests for a short time including moments of self-care and then get back into the fight. Our children are waiting on us, counting on us.”
  - Wisconsin parent reflecting on impacts of racism

PARTNERS

Children’s museums
Cooperative Education Service Agencies (CESAs), Schools, Districts
Family foundations
Family resource centers
Healthy Early
Kids Forward
Rooted
Supporting Families Together Association
United Way children’s network
UW–Madison Division of Extension
Wisconsin & UP Michigan State Alliance of YMCAs
Wisconsin Birth to 3 Program for Families
Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, including YoungStar
Wisconsin Department of Health Services, including the Wisconsin WIC, (Women, Infants, and Children) Program, and the Maternal and Child Health Program
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Wisconsin Early Childhood Association

ABOUT

The Prenatal to Five Initiative (P25) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison investigates and advances healthy early childhood development priorities across Wisconsin and beyond.

P25 LEADERSHIP

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